United Nations S/PV.8354

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8354th meeting
Monday, 17 September 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Cohen	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alahmad
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/824)

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18-28821 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/824)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar, Afghan youth representative.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/824, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: It is a time for important decisions in Afghanistan. These decisions will affect the fundamental fabric of the society and the future of Afghanistan. The Afghan people are scheduled to cast their votes on 20 October to choose their parliamentary representatives for the first time since 2010. Strategic decisions, underpinned by a national consensus, will need to be taken to guide the next steps towards peace.

On 28 November in Geneva, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations will co-chair a ministerial conference on Afghanistan, at which all aspects of civilian efforts in the country will be placed on the table for review and mutual commitment.

Just over a month from now, the Afghan people are scheduled to go to the polls. I have met many Afghans across the country who have impressed upon me their desire to exercise their right to elect their representatives. Many will face considerable risks to do that. Operationally and technically, the preparations are on track, yet I remain very concerned that political challenges could jeopardize the tight timelines and derail the elections unless all political leaders are engaged constructively and peacefully to ensure that elections are held on time. Security is also a serious concern.

From a technical point of view alone, elections are possible. The candidate lists were finalized in time to enable the printing of ballot papers to meet the deadline. The recruitment of the election officials is on track. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced that more than 9 million people had registered to vote. Many opposition parties remain sceptical about that number, citing both the security concerns that would have prevented many people from registering and alleging fraud. Several safeguards for the verification of voter lists and fraud prevention measures are being put in place. Despite those measures, scepticism remains. Over the past few days, supporters of a coalition of political parties have started to block several provincial election commission offices, demanding that additional safeguards be put in place. Such actions hinder the work of the IEC and jeopardize the holding of the elections on time. Political concerns must be addressed through institutional mechanisms, not through blockades.

Regardless of the reforms that are being implemented, the parliamentary elections will undoubtedly be a major test for Afghanistan's young democratic institutions. Almost one-third of Afghanistan's more than 7,000 polling centres will not open due to insecurity. That raises concerns about inclusivity. The main question is therefore not whether the elections will be imperfect but how Afghanistan's electoral institutions will manage such limitations.

In my communications with the political actors in Afghanistan, I have consistently stressed three key points. First, continued international support should not be taken for granted. That is also true for the continuation of the constitutional order. Secondly, there must be an awareness that the parliamentary elections have implications beyond selecting parliamentarians,

including for the presidential election in April 2019. We are aware of the real possibility of fraud taking place, as well as allegations of fraud, which may have the tactical purpose of discrediting the already difficult elections. The Afghan institutions must combat both. Thirdly, I urge all political actors and institutions to perform their duties, to act responsibly and to think of the Afghan people, bearing in mind the country's bitter past.

At this critical juncture, the Independent Election Commission, as the lead institution on elections, will be expected to discharge its function with the highest degree of integrity, with professionalism and with full accountability to the Afghan people. The Afghan institutions and political leaders have a shared responsibility for the success of the elections. I also urge the IEC to redouble its efforts to reach out to the public in order to raise awareness of that important process. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will do everything possible within its mandate and with the resources available to support a successful electoral process.

President Ghani's offer to the Taliban in February this year to engage in talks without preconditions created unprecedented political space for peace, culminating in a temporary ceasefire in June. It showed that reconciliation was possible. That newfound momentum was further supported by numerous citizen mobilizations, demonstrating the desire for a peaceful future. The second ceasefire, proposed by the Government in August, was unfortunately not reciprocated by the Taliban. Peace processes rarely move along straight lines. Setbacks were to be expected. However, I believe that all actors recognized the craving of the Afghan people for peace and the undeniable need for a peace process. Whatever setbacks may lie ahead, we are in a better position now than at any time in the past 17 years to commence a process leading to talks for a negotiated end to the conflict.

The most difficult phases lie ahead. They will require resilience and persistence on the part of all sides. The efforts of the Afghan Government, which we hope will be reciprocated by the Taliban, need to be reinforced by the coordinated approach of the regional and other key countries to move forward. I urge all sides to agree on concrete measures to build confidence towards more structured talks. Such key confidence-building steps could include prisoner releases and their treatment, as well as measures at the technical level in fields such as agriculture, education and health in contested areas. They could lead to the cessation of violence, or at least a significant reduction. All sides must realize that there is no military solution to the conflict. I also wish to underline the importance of ensuring the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the promotion, establishment and maintenance of peace and security.

The recent attack on the provincial capital of Ghazni and the frequent suicide attacks in Kabul and elsewhere remind us of the terrible toll on civilian lives and livelihoods. In the first six months of this year, UNAMA recorded the highest number of civilian deaths since the Mission started to track civilian casualties. In recent weeks, we have also seen a continuation of the disturbing pattern of attacks targeting the Shia Muslim community. Each death is an individual tragedy, but it is also a tragedy for the country. Reconciliation becomes harder with each life lost.

Insecurity is also taking its toll on journalists and aid workers. This year alone, 13 journalists have lost their lives and many more have been wounded. That is the highest number of deaths in any country. I urge the Government to take additional measures to enhance their protection. Also this year, 23 aid workers have lost their lives, 37 have been injured and 74 have been abducted, making Afghanistan the second most dangerous country in which the profession conducts its work, while 2.2 million people are suffering from the country's worst drought in years.

Two months from now, the Afghan Government and its international partners will gather in Geneva at the ministerial level in order to discuss all aspects of civilian efforts in Afghanistan. That is the biennial opportunity, at the ministerial level, to follow up on the mutual commitment made in Bonn in 2011. The Geneva ministerial conference will be held at the mid-point of the transformation decade, which ends in 2024. Together with the long-term international commitments in the security field, the Geneva ministerial conference will signal sustained political commitment to Afghanistan provided that the Afghan side lives up to its commitment to reforms and development. The Afghan Government committed to the delivery of six benchmarks, namely, first, the holding of parliamentary elections; secondly, advancing its anti-corruption efforts; thirdly, reforming the security sector; fourthly, meeting the International Monetary Fund benchmarks; fifthly, promoting private sector development; and, sixthly, the development of national priority programmes. The Geneva conference

will also provide an opportunity for the international community to further clarify its expectations regarding the peace process and the ways in which it can support such a process.

We recently lost an icon of the international community. In 2001, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan began his Nobel Peace Prize speech with a few simple words. He said: "Today, in Afghanistan, a girl will be born." That girl is now almost a woman who will soon be old enough to vote, to attend university and to pursue the vocation of her dreams. Will she be able to? I am sure that that girl will be watching closely the developments of the next few months.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bakhtiar.

Mr. Bakhtiar: It is a great honour to speak in the Security Council in my capacity as the Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations at a time when many Afghans feel forgotten by the international community and overwhelmed by a merciless war. The Council is communicating an important message to our people by giving a young Afghan this platform as well as expressing support for the active participation of youth in decision-making, in line with resolution 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018).

I realize that this is an opportunity for me, as someone living and working in that country as a youth activist, to draw attention to the more complex and nuanced reality of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has suffered so much and for so long. It is our reality. I am pleased to say that it is also a reality that our resilience, progress and aspirations keep us focused on working for a better tomorrow.

We are not a failed nation; we are a resilient nation that has been tested and challenged in a way very few other nations have ever been. We ourselves are not only the victims of global terrorism; we are also fighting it on behalf of all others. Afghans are at the front lines of the battle against our common enemy.

The young generation of Afghanistan shares common values and interests with our global partners and friends that allow us to strengthen and deepen our partnership with our friends in the region and with our allies throughout the world.

Two thirds of Afghanistan's population is under the age of 25. These young people barely remember the time of the Taliban, let alone previous regimes. They belong to a new Afghanistan. They have ambitions similar to those of their fellow youth in other parts of the world. The youth of Afghanistan are different in their way of thinking, in their approach and in the way they define and see our relationship with the world in the next 10 to 20 years. They are true partners to the rest of the world; they do not just expect permanent dependency on it but are trying hard to achieve interdependency, trust and cooperation.

Our ambition is to make our country a hub for regional connectivity and a land of opportunities. We want the world to explore our culture and music and learn our history. We were a nation that embraced diversity as an asset and respected our religious beliefs. Our generation is committed to reviving our historical values once again.

The young generation of Afghanistan has been the key driver of many of the successes of the past 17 years. The media is one shining example. In 2001, independent media were virtually non-existent. Today Afghan journalists are doing heroic work under incredibly difficult circumstances. Afghan media play an increasingly significant role in giving a voice to voiceless Afghans and in holding power to account. We have lost 53 journalists in a little less than four years. Before coming to New York, I lost two of my colleagues and friends from TOLOnews TV, Samim Faramarz and Ramiz Ahmadi, in twin bombings as they were reporting live from a blast site. Their colleagues were simultaneously mourning, reporting and looking after their families. That is our reality of both pain and strength.

We are certain that Afghanistan will never go back to the past, because there are thousands of like-minded youth who are hopeful and are working fearlessly to remake their country with their own hands, and they have the hope that the international community will not abandon them halfway.

Terrorism has affected all Afghans. More than anyone else we want peace in our country. We are holding the fort with our resilience and hope. We expect the Council to focus on the real causes of terrorism and force all regional players to play a constructive role in Afghanistan.

A few days ago, Kabul lost 17-year-old Rahila, who was killed by a suicide bomber along with 47 other students in an educational centre. She had written in her diary about her dreams and future goals:

> "I can be the Rahila that society desperately needs in its pursuit of prosperity and progress. This society will overcome its current crisis through solutions drawn from the knowledge and education of its youth".

A few days after Rahila was killed just for going to school, her brother established a library under her name in Kabul to complete his sister's dream of educating girls in Afghanistan. That is a clear demonstration of Afghan resolve.

In another attempt at peace, earlier this year a caravan from the southern province of Helmand started walking — barefoot — to Kabul, demanding peace. One of the members of the Helmand Peace March is 22-year-old Zaheer Ahmad Zindani, who was blinded five years ago by a roadside bomb. In August 2018, I met with the caravan in Kabul, and they asked me to convey this message:

> "Afghans are now going through the deadliest days, weeks, years and decades. We have lost our finest ones to this bloody war. But we want peace, and peace in Afghanistan cannot come without the support and the will of the international community, in particular the United Nations. We therefore call on all countries involved with the issue of Afghanistan not to spend resources and human capital on the excesses of war but on bringing long-lasting peace to Afghanistan".

The caravan is still walking and just reached Mazar-e-Sharif. They have said that they will not stop walking until peace has been achieved. That is the resolve and resilience of our generation.

Our generation also believes in democracy. We expect our elections to happen next month. We fear that because of various challenges the elections will trigger nationwide unrest. The Council has a key role in keeping our Government focused on national priorities, including holding acceptable elections, fighting corruption and supporting our security forces in their tough fight.

Let me say by way of conclusion that I drafted my speech on 9/11, but in 2018. This brought to mind the terrorists' most heinous attack on the World Trade Center Twin Towers. This should be a reminder of the fact that terrorism is a global phenomenon that threatens us all. We all have the responsibility to ensure that such an atrocity never happens again. This can be ensured when we all shoulder our share of responsibility and fight against terrorism together.

On behalf of all Afghans, I am grateful for everyone's sacrifices and contributions in rebuilding Afghanistan.

The President: I thank Mr. Bhaktiar for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me begin by conveying our best wishes for a successful Council presidency in September and our gratitude to the United States for having convened today's debate on Afghanistan. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing. We are particularly pleased by the presence of Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar, Afghanistan's first-ever United Nations Youth Representative. We were pleased to see him address the Council today and reflect the voice of our youth on the overall situation in the country. His merit-based selection as our United Nations Youth Representative is a manifestation of how far our younger generation has come in becoming proactive agents of change in society.

Today's meeting of the Security Council takes place at a crucial moment, as we draw near to the parliamentary elections scheduled for next month and the international Geneva Conference on Afghanistan in November, to be followed by the anticipated presidential elections, in April 2019. If all goes well, by the middle of next year we should have completed our political transition, with a new Parliament and a new Government.

Meanwhile, our security forces are leading the national struggle against terrorist and extremist groups, which have increased their brutality against our people as part of a renewed attempt to take even more innocent lives, including those of journalists and aid workers, and subvert our progress.

As guardians of our territorial integrity, our national security forces continue to grow in size, strength and professionalism. Moreover, in addition to the substantial increase of our special forces, we are also working to triple the size of our air force by 2020. This, together with our ongoing reform, will have a

profound impact in terms of enhancing our fight against international terrorism.

In the broader context, and despite the difficult security environment, we remain on track to solidify gains in different areas, including governance and development. This is due primarily to the strength and resilience of our people in defying complex challenges, as they have so courageously done throughout the course of our nation's history; and secondly, to the continued support of our many friends and allies in the international community.

The core objective of our enduring partnership with the international community is based on achieving a sustainable peace that is seen as just and comprehensive. As we take stock of the status of peace efforts through new outreach to the Taliban, we need to draw the right lessons from the history of engagement with that group. This is essential to ensure that we are indeed on the right track as we move forward.

Following our sustained efforts, this year at the Kabul process conference in February we launched a reinvigorated and more flexible peace plan that presented unprecedented incentives that were unanticipated even by the Taliban. It included unconditional talks and measures for their return to and reintegration into society. Lately, through increased diplomatic engagement with various partners, we have strengthened regional and international consensus in support of peace efforts. The successive civil mobilizations and gatherings of Islamic scholars in Kabul, Jakarta and Jeddah helped to enable and welcome the first-ever temporary ceasefire with the Taliban in June. Nevertheless, despite that brief lull in fighting, the Taliban rejected the second ceasefire proposed by us and welcomed by the Council. Making real progress in peace efforts will not be possible unless the consistent pattern of manipulating, misusing opportunities and using deception for strategic gains comes to an end.

Afghanistan stands fully committed to engaging in a genuine peace process with tangible results for our people. However, the guiding principle in moving forward dictates that the fundamental factors that have prevented peace efforts from gaining traction must first be adequately detected and then addressed. All along, we have underscored the importance of regional support for our peace efforts, with a specific role for Pakistan. Advancing the peace process is a key element of the recently signed Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. We welcome last Saturday's visit of Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to Kabul, where he expressed his Government's readiness to support peace and stability in Afghanistan. The key determinant in validating that commitment will be the full and effective implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity.

For nearly a quarter of a century, Afghanistan has been the site of what I term the "geographical genocide" of certain circles within our region. The expectation is that my country should either become their "trusted" agent or be weakened, bled and represented as the horrific face of terror around the world, devoid of its independence, advancement, rich culture and history. The erratic positions of the Taliban in the peace talks, their leaderless profile, factional structure and brutal attacks are used to pursue this policy. Such genocide, with casualties of more than 10,000 a year and traumatizing millions — as we have heard in the presentation by our youth representative — has had a negative impact on almost everything else in our country, including governance, economy, electoral process, anti-corruption, counter-narcotics and so on. The important thing is that we either address the root causes or continue to talk about their consequences.

Afghanistan has clearly asserted that regional and international support is vital to the success of the Afghan-led peace process. We welcome all coordinated efforts leading to direct talks that can generate concrete results, rather than a repeat of the past. We are keenly following the interactions of some of our partners with the Taliban, which are being coordinated with the Afghan Government.

Let me take this opportunity to express a word of thanks to all partners, inside and outside our region, who are supporting our peace process. Such efforts, rendered in a manner that reinforces our ownership and leadership of the process, remain essential.

Other key issues are the upcoming elections, which will determine our future stability. Efforts are under way to ensure that the elections are free, fair, inclusive and transparent, in accordance with the will of our people. The successful electoral outcome will have a profound impact on the future positive trajectory of Afghanistan. Our people expect us to deliver on this national process by addressing legitimate concerns and preventing fraud and insecurity from jeopardizing the process.

We welcome the Security Council's new emphasis on the imperative of transparent elections, as emphasized in its presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/15) and press statements issued in July and August. This is a welcome development, acknowledged by the people and Government of Afghanistan. Furthermore, our national unity and political stability provide the best guarantee for the long-term stability of our country. In this light, through a broad national dialogue, we need to work on all outstanding issues related to upcoming elections and win the trust of most stakeholders. We know full well that successful elections and achieving other important national objectives can best be realized in a spirit of unity and understanding.

The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in November will mark a new chapter in relations with our international partners. Geneva will be a chance for us to brief the international community on progress made against the benchmarks of the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. More broadly, it will explore the way forward with respect to peace efforts and the regional economic cooperation agenda, which is one of the main achievements of the National Unity Government.

The endorsement of a new mutual accountability framework will refine the nature of our cooperation to make it more impactful for our people, through the improvement of development aid from international donors and effective project completion in the context of our national development strategy. The preparatory meeting for the Ministerial Conference — co-chaired by Foreign Minister Rabbani, Finance Minister Qayumi and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto — will be held here in New York on Sunday. We look forward to seeing everyone there.

We have always placed special emphasis on achieving an environment in our region, where various neighbours work in tandem, in a spirit of mutual trust and confidence for win-win cooperation. We have done so believing that only such an approach will lead to success in overcoming common transnational threats and challenges. We continue to widen our network of bilateral arrangements with regional countries, including Central Asian States. In the same spirit, we recognize the enormous economic and other potentials that are yet to be fully utilized.

That is precisely the reason behind various Afghan-led initiatives, such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA). New memberships in the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process signal growing interest among the broader region. We hope the review and renewal of the confidence-building measures will enable each to make progress at a more equal and similar pace. Furthermore, the RECCA process has achieved phenomenal success in advancing regional connectivity and infrastructure development, turning our country into a platform of cordiality for all.

In conclusion, let us bear in mind that we, collectively, stand at a crossroads in our strategic journey for peace and stability in Afghanistan and, more broadly, for global security. In that regard, the start of our partnership with the international community in 2001 generated a contract aimed at securing a stable future for our current and future generations. Together, we have come a long way, reaching the last stage of the transformation decade for self-reliance. Let us complete this vital journey with greater resolve and commitment.

The President: I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to start by thanking Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and Ambassador Saikal for his statement.

We also warmly welcome Ramiz Bakhtiar as the first youth representative for Afghanistan, and thank the United States presidency for inviting him. Ramiz was elected in June as part of a joint initiative by Afghanistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. We are very pleased to see Ramiz here today to give Afghan youth a voice and have it be heard on a global stage. It is important that the Council fully take the youth perspective into account, as we agreed in resolution 2419 (2018), on youth, peace and security. Let the briefing of Ramiz be the start of a new normal in which we do not only talk about the future generation, but also let the future generation participate in the talking.

Allow me to focus on three issues today: the upcoming elections, Afghanistan's long-term reform agenda and the importance of youth.

The importance of the Afghan parliamentary elections on 20 October and presidential elections on 20 April next year cannot be overstated. It is absolutely critical that the elections be free, transparent and inclusive, and that they include the active involvement

of youth and women, both as voters and as candidates. Afghanistan and the Independent Election Commission will have to do their utmost to ensure that the elections take place in an orderly and credible way. Political actors from across the political spectrum have to remain engaged with the political process in a constructive and peaceful manner, while they uphold the highest democratic standards. Threats of disengagement or boycotts are not in the interest of the Afghan people.

For successful elections, it is also indispensable to have a secure environment. We are deeply concerned by the recent spike in violence, following the score of tragic terrorist attacks and the unjustifiable offensives of the Taliban. The displayed contempt for the lives of innocent civilians is unacceptable, and we condemn it in the strongest terms. We urge the Taliban to reciprocate the offer of the Afghan Government to engage in direct peace negotiations. There is no alternative to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

My second point concerns Afghanistan's long-term reform agenda. If Afghanistan is to enjoy durable peace and prosperity, reliable and resilient public institutions need to be in place. Afghanistan's transformation decade will soon reach its halfway mark, and the upcoming Geneva Ministerial Conference will provide the opportunity to assess progress and to align priorities for the coming period.

To achieve the agreed objectives, the Afghan Government will need to step up its efforts to end corruption, strengthen governance and the rule of law, and guarantee respect for human rights, with an important support role for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), of course. Such reforms will provide a new generation with the opportunity to contribute to a more just, stable and unified Afghanistan. We look forward to the participation of all interested countries in the Geneva Conference, expressing their full solidarity and support for Afghanistan.

Allow me to zoom in on the importance of involving youth in the discussions that fundamentally shape their future. Ramiz and so many of his Afghan peers are determined to contribute to the future of Afghanistan. That sends a very hopeful and powerful message. In a country where more than 63 per cent of the population is under 25, the ambition and commitment of young people represent one of Afghanistan's greatest opportunities. Their active involvement in addressing the challenges that Afghanistan faces is key.

In conclusion, the voice of Afghanistan's people, including its youth, is clear — we need a workable peace deal. That will require political courage. It will require perseverance. On the Council's side, it will require continued unity in its support. Galvanizing the momentum of the Afghan-owned peace process is our collective responsibility. The briefings by the Special Representative and Ramiz gave us important food for thought in that regard, including by reminding us of the significance of investing in Afghanistan's youth on the road to peace and stability.

Finally, I want to thank the Special Representative and his team for their tremendous efforts in assisting Afghanistan, often in difficult circumstances. They deserve our full support.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the progress we have seen in the electoral process in Afghanistan. We are also hopeful about the fact that 8.9 million Afghans, including more than 3 million women, will be able to exercise their democratic right to vote in the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections on 20 October.

We highlight the resolve of Afghan women and men to participate in their electoral process with a participative and inclusive spirit, while expressing their desire to bolster the conditions necessary in order to ensure credible elections in the framework of their own fully sovereign, democratic practices without any external intervention, and with the full participation of women and minority groups, including all ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, both as voters and as candidates.

We also express our full support and recognition for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which, in close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan, has been supporting the organization of the elections through technical assistance and other forms of collaboration. We hope that the electoral process will be carried out in a secure and stable environment. The participation of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which have shown leadership in the maintenance of security in Afghanistan, is critical in that regard.

In that order of priorities, we take note of the fact that violence diminished during the Eid al-Fitr ceasefire

period. We regret that during the week of that holiday, UNAMA nonetheless recorded 285 incidents and that, in the weeks following the ceasefire, armed clashes with the Taliban increased once again.

We hope that the effects of the conflict will not exacerbate the situation of civil society, which in the first semester of 2018 suffered 1,692 deaths. The attacks on civilian infrastructure, schools, hospitals and media and communications offices highlight the violence to which Afghan society is subject. Bolivia calls on all parties to fulfil their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law in order to prevent attacks on the civilian population and civilian infrastructure.

On the other hand, serious restrictions on obtaining redress in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, along with the high prevailing degree of impunity, highlight the need to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights. We believe that the Afghan authorities should take all the measures needed to assist the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission to play its fundamental role as an effective and independent institution.

Finally, and as we have noted previously, we condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks that took place on 5 September in Kabul, which were claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and on 11 September in Nangarhar, both of which resulted in the death of at least 61 people and an as-yet undetermined number of wounded. Bolivia reiterates that any act of terrorism is criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of its motivation, andwherever, whenever and by whomever it is committed. The international community as a whole must join forces to cooperate with Afghanistan in combating this evil within the framework of respect for its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and, through him, the entire team in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for the work they do. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for reminding us of the Kofi Annan story about the young girl. It is good to be reminded of the human dimension. It is therefore doubly pleasurable to be able to welcome Mr. Bakhtiar and hear his perspective, as well as that of the Afghan ambassador.

Like other speakers, I would like to begin by condemning the recent terrorist attacks, including those in Nangarhar, and offering our condolences to all the families of those killed and wounded. We need to continue all our efforts to support the Afghan forces as they seek to combat those who would destroy communities and the lives of innocent, ordinary Afghan civilians.

Today's debate is an important one. It is the last of the quarterly debates before the parliamentary elections on 20 October. I would like to focus on those elections in my statement today. Mr. Yamamoto highlighted the challenges of organizing these elections on time. We are also very grateful for the work of his team in supporting the Afghan authorities. All political leaders in Afghanistan should work to improve the process, not to undermine it. We call on them to cooperate to this end. At the moment, a number of critical issues on the elections remain unresolved.

First, with respect to the voter registration lists, the election staff in Kabul has put a lot of effort into compiling and verifying the lists of those who have registered to vote. These lists should be published at the local level as early as possible, with the proper complaints mechanism in place to give the Afghan people time to check their details and register any complaints.

Secondly, with regard to communications, an effective communications strategy from the election-management bodies explaining the progress that has been made and what further efforts are under way is important for the confidence of the Afghan electorate.

Thirdly, with respect to the security of voters, elections officials and election materials, my Government calls on all actors to respect the safety and lives of civilians who take part in the elections, and calls on those actors to refrain from violent disruption.

We commend the bravery of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for their work, and we know that it is a difficult time for them. We call on those illegally blockading provincial offices of the Independent Election Commission to disperse peacefully. Elections are only five weeks away, and it is critical that preparations be allowed to go ahead.

Turning to wider matters, I had the honour to be British Ambassador to Afghanistan in 2015 and 2016,

so I would like to tell Mr. Bakhtiar and Ambassador Saikal that I remain an optimist about their beautiful but troubled country. Given what Afghanistan has suffered, given her state of development — she is one of the poorest countries in the world — and given that the main threat to Afghan security comes from insurgents who are supported from outside Afghanistan, I think we are all prepared for this to take a long time. The international community has been prepared for that and has prepared longer-term strategies.

The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which a number of speakers have mentioned, will, we believe, be an important moment for the Government of Afghanistan to reflect on progress made so far, but also to recommit to the necessary reforms, which are required to drive the sustainable and inclusive growth the Afghan people deserve over the remainder of the transformation decade. My Government is fully committed to the Conference and to playing its part in preparations that are now under way.

That said, it is important that, in all the security, economic, human rights and development challenges that the Afghan people face, all sectors of Afghan society and citizenry come together to do the following things: to strengthen good governance, to uphold the rule of law and human rights, including the right to health, the education of women and girls, and above all, to be tolerant. I arrived in Kabul a week after the very sad killing of Farkhunda Malikzada, and I have never forgotten the intolerance and brutality that led to that sad outcome. Afghan communities need to invest in the future. They need to tackle corruption at all levels, engage in the economic liberalization necessary to attract foreign direct investment, and make tangible progress with their regional partners on regional cooperation.

We heard from the Afghan ambassador and from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General about the peace process with Pakistan. We wish that process well. It goes without saying that peace is the only viable way forward for Afghanistan. We very much support the National Unity Government in its efforts in this regard. We hope that all other States will do their utmost to support the Government. The temporary ceasefire brought about by President Ghani was a very important moment, and it is regrettable that the Taliban have not responded to his subsequent offers. The Taliban need to demonstrate that their really do have the heart of Afghanistan as their main concern and that their concern is for the people of Afghanistan. They need to respond positively to the important offers made by President Ghani in February.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his analysis of the processes taking place in Afghanistan. We listened closely to the statements delivered by the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, and by Mr. Bakhtiar. We concur with many of the assessments contained in the relevant quarterly report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/824). For our part, we wish to note the following.

We are profoundly alarmed at the security situation in Afghanistan. The Taliban movement controls nearly half of the country, periodically seizing new districts, including in the north. We note that its fighters have a capacity to stage large-scale, coordinated and well-prepared operations. A stark example of this fact are the days-long attacks against the strategically important Ghazni province, the large-scale attacks against Ghor, Farah and Sari Pul, and the difficult situations that have unfolded in Paktia, Helmand, Faryab, Samangan, Herat and Kunduz. Against that backdrop, we are especially troubled by the state of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which incur unprecedented losses on a daily basis.

Our attention remains closely focused on the surge of terrorist activity by the Afghan wing of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), whose ranks are growing largely due to foreign fighters with battlefield experience from Syria and Iraq. According to our sources, the number of ISIL adherents may be as high as 10,000. The danger is further compounded by their growing ideological, propagandistic and recruitment activity, which makes skillful use of information and communication technology. Despite reports about fighters being routed and their partial surrender to Government forces in Jawzjan in August, they still retain footholds in provinces of the north and north-east, from where they seek to gain traction in the country. We see a threat both to our borders and to those of our Central Asian neighbhours. The Taliban also sporadically joins the fight against ISIL, largely in the north and east of Afghanistan, which points to the fact that the ISIL threat is recognized both by the authorities in Kabul and by the Taliban. We must stress

that the fight against the terrorists in Afghanistan would be far more effective if regional and international efforts were combined.

With respect to Afghanistan and other conflicts, what remains relevant is our initiative to establish a wide-ranging counter-terrorist coalition. It is necessary to shed light on the situation regarding the unmarked helicopter flights in northern Afghanistan, which provide both weaponry and munitions to ISIL adherents. We are surprised by the fact that there has been no response to those events, including from the command of the NATO contingent stationed there. We believe that attempts to sweep this issue under the rug are not acceptable. We are troubled by reports about attempts by the Afghan wing of ISIL to reach agreement with the Taliban movement and other organizations to coordinate operations. Moreover, contacts are being strengthened between ISIL and representatives of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement. In the light of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, we deem it necessary to proactively leverage the Security Council's counter-terrorism sanctions mechanisms. We advocate the placement of additional barriers to pre-empt terrorist activity in that country. It is important to specifically emphasize the sanctioning of individuals and entities who are complicit in ISIL operations.

We are troubled at the unbridled growth in narcotics production. Narcotics provide significant financial support for terrorists in Afghanistan. In that connection, we are confounded at the fact that the issue of Afghan narcotics is completely disregarded in the final observations of the report. We believe that it is important for this to be prioritized. It is the thrust of our practical measures, including through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The Russian Federation spares no effort in supporting the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in that regard, including providing regular assistance to the UNODC-led Paris Pact Initiative, which seeks to comprehensively prevent Afghan opium production, the regional UNODC programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries and the alternative development programme in Badakhshan province. We are pleased at the implementation of our initiative to train narcotics police officers from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asian countries, as well as the joint Domodedovo project with Japan to form a canine unit for Afghanistan, which we trust will serve as a key tool in the fight against narcotics in the country.

We note with regret that the 17-year, large-scale military presence of NATO and United States troops has not served to stabilize the military and political situation in the country. What is clear is that the approach of using force to exert pressure has not brought about the desired results; it only escalates the conflict. We believe that there is no military solution to the crisis in Afghanistan. The only way to resolve the crisis is through pan-Afghan consensus achieved through political and diplomatic means. That is especially urgent at the current juncture on the eve of elections, which should serve as a step towards the unification of the country. We support the policy of Kabul and the country's social and political forces to achieve that end. We believe that negotiations need to be conducted under the leadership of the Afghan people themselves. We reaffirm our willingness to lend our fullest support.

We welcome international and regional efforts to assist Afghanistan in establishing a peace process. However, it is paramount that there be no competition in that regard: it is not about building fiefdoms. We must instead build an optimal platform for international support for establishing a peace process in Afghanistan by engaging the stakeholders. Such a vision is advanced by the Moscow format of consultations with Afghanistan, a meeting of which we plan to hold with the participation of representatives of the Taliban, following the formulation of a consolidated position on the matter in Kabul. We trust that the United States will be involved. The invitation still stands.

We note the growing understanding worldwide of the importance of the regional context to any Afghan settlement. We note in particular the renewed SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. We see sound potential for scaling up counter-narcotics engagement between Afghanistan and the CSTO.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to play an important role in coordinating international assistance to Afghanistan. We commend the selfless and courageous efforts UNAMA personnel.

Russia and Afghanistan are linked together by historical, friendly, open relations based on trust. We genuinely hope to see swift stabilization in the country, for it to get back on track to sustainable development. On

that basis, we stand ready to engage with Afghanistan and with regional and international partners.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Our delegation wishes to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for the comprehensive and detailed report (S/2018/824) on developments in the situation in Afghanistan and for the valuable information provided in his briefing here today. We also thank Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar, Afghan youth representative, and welcome his participation in this important debate and his very constructive statement on the situation in Afghanistan.

First of all, we would like to convey our deepest condolences to the people and the Government of Afghanistan following the most recent outrageous terrorist attacks — yet again, let us recognize them as acts of cowardice — in Kabul and Nangarhar on 5 and 11 September, respectively.

We are highly dismayed and concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan. The country has once again been shaken by a wave of bloody terrorist attacks that have claimed the lives of approximately 1,692 Afghan civilians, in the short period of only six months, as reflected in the report under discussion, from January to June. The increase in suicide and air attacks — of 38 per cent and 46 per cent, respectively — as compared to the same period in 2017 is alarming. Indeed, the number of fatalities reported this year by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has exceeded 5,000. It is unacceptable and inconceivable to remain indifferent to such barbaric acts, especially since they have greatest impact on the most vulnerable sector of the population.

A convergence of factors clearly hinders the realization of the peace and security the Afghan people seek. However, as we have discussed at length in this Chamber, a solution to Afghanistan's conflicts can be found only through effective, constructive and direct political negotiations among the relevant parties, as well as the holding of transparent and inclusive elections whereby Afghans determine the political and socioeconomic system most fitting to their customs and culture and favourable to the interests and well-being of the Afghan people. Allow me to make some observations regarding some factors contributing to the instability and insecurity in Afghanistan.

First, on the political front — and in no way do I wish to minimize the progress and achievements of the Afghan Government, the international community and other regional and international actors with respect to peace agreements and other accords — we believe that the status quo in Afghanistan has not been improved to date because some of the parties involved in the conflict and their respective partners have put their interests before those of the Afghan people. All negotiations must be focused solely and exclusively on seeking solutions to the real problems that Afghanistan is facing related to security, stability, the prosperity of the Afghan people and the promotion of national reconciliation as a fundamental way of resolving the problems of the Afghan people.

We must bear in mind that there will always be a party that does not believe its interests and the interests of the Afghan people are being met. Therefore, it is no coincidence that, as the elections on 20 October approach, we are seeing an increase in attacks and efforts not only to boycott the elections, but also to paralyse a democratic political process through the political mobilization of opposition groups, occupation and closure of the facilities of the Independent Electoral Commission in some provinces, among other things. As they are not practices that are worthy of anyone wishing to govern the country democratically, we urge all parties to participate in a meaningful way in the political process aimed at bringing about lasting peace and stability for the people of Afghanistan.

The Government of Equatorial Guinea commends the Afghan Government for the positive progress made towards holding the elections despite the difficulties that are arising. We encourage the Government not to waver in its diligent efforts to conduct successful elections, which we believe will represent a positive change for the Afghan people. We also welcome President Ghani's new call for a ceasefire. We believe that demonstrates his real commitment to achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan. We call on all armed groups, in particular the Taliban, to respond positively to the appeals of President Ghani and the Government to refrain from committing violent actions and to come to the negotiating table.

Secondly, attacks against public facilities, as have been noted in the most recent attacks, are particularly alarming. For our delegation, the chilling numbers of civilians killed and wounded so far in 2018 remain cause for dismay. Amid those horrifying statistics, the proportion of children and women killed and wounded and the ongoing extreme damage inflicted on civilians

by constant suicide bombings and other improvised explosive device attacks is extremely worrying. We therefore again urge all parties to the conflict to take every possible measure to protect civilians, especially women and children, in accordance with international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights standards.

Another factor that we believe is increasing instability and insecurity among the Afghan people, and which also concerns us, is the significant increase in opium production. We are aware of the close relationship between the cultivation and trafficking of opium and terrorism. In that context, we commend the counter-narcotics operations carried out by the Government, with the support of the international community and in close cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which resulted in a high number of narcotics seizures, the arrest of drug traffickers and the closure of heroin laboratories, among other successes.

Thirdly, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to have a debate on the situation in Afghanistan without addressing the issue of humanitarian assistance. Based on information from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, two thirds of Afghanistan is suffering from an unusually severe drought, which has caused more than 100,000 people to leave their homes in search of water. That situation, together with the prevalence of diseases such as polio and others, constitutes a combination of serious consequences, and we must urgently find the most effective way to provide humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea acknowledges and is grateful for the crucial role played by the UNAMA and all United Nations agencies, as well as the role that countries of the region are playing in support of the Afghan people, to foster peace and reconciliation, monitor and promote human rights and help enhance the credibility, integrity, inclusiveness and sustainability of the electoral process, as well as to ensure better coordination of the assistance of the international community in Afghanistan.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. We are also grateful for the briefings by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto and Ramiz Bakhtiar, representative of Afghan youth. We also thank Ambassador Saikal for his statement. We would also like to welcome the appointment of Ms. Ingrid Hayden as Deputy Special Representative for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Peru notes with concern the complex security situation in Afghanistan. We vigorously condemn the continued terrorist attacks against the population and civilian infrastructure. We express our solidarity with the victims and their families of the most recent attacks carried out by Da'esh in Kabul and Nangarhar.

We stress the need to address terrorism in a comprehensive manner, including tackling its root causes. Terrorists must be held accountable for their crimes. Their links with transnational organized crime, in particular illicit drug trafficking, must be identified and combated. We consider it of the utmost importance that the political class remain united, in view of the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections, in order to guarantee the stability and governability of the country and, based on that, to overcome the serious challenges that the country faces.

We note with concern the threats of electoral boycott by some political sectors, and we agree with the Secretary-General on the need to participate responsibly and constructively in the ongoing process. We hope that all political forces, and citizens in general, will be able to participate massively in the elections, in safe conditions and in the spirit of democratic unity.

We would like to highlight the Government's commitment to women's empowerment, and the support provided by UNAMA in that area. We believe it is particularly important to promote greater participation by women and young people, such as Ramiz Bakhtiar, in the political life of the country, in accordance with resolution 2419 (2018), in order to build a shared vision for the future and to combat violent extremism.

We would also like to highlight President Ghani's initiative to promote direct negotiations with the Taliban. However, it is regrettable that the Taliban did not respect the ceasefire proposed by the Government. We believe that intra-Afghan dialogue, supported by the international community and the countries of the region, offers the only viable path towards sustainable peace in the country. In that connection, we look forward to the convening of a ministerial conference in Geneva in November so that the international community can revitalize its commitment to peace and development in Afghanistan.

We underscore the need to strengthen Afghanistan's defence and security capabilities to reduce the country's external dependence. Similarly, we stress the importance of supporting the Government's efforts to modernize and boost the economy and generate decent employment for young people, who represent 60 per cent of the population and often fall prey to violent extremism and drug trafficking. In that regard, we note with concern the humanitarian crisis and the displacement of people caused by the drought that is besetting the country. Nearly 1.5 million people require assistance. I would like to conclude by highlighting the work being done by UNAMA, including on the humanitarian front.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We are grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and personal contribution to achieving the goal of peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. We applaud the work and dedication of his able team. We are also grateful to the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, and Afghan youth representative Ramiz Bakhtiar for their statements.

The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/824) provides a realistic assessment and important insights into the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations country team. It includes constructive recommendations that the United Nations system and the international community need to implement right away. At this critical juncture, it would enable us to leverage the comparative advantage of global and regional stakeholders in support of reconstruction and redevelopment in Afghanistan. My delegation would like to make the following key points.

First, with regard to the political process, we share the view of Kabul that the process should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Kazakhstan firmly supports the reconciliation and reintegration efforts undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan and its continued commitment to addressing the increasing political, economic and security challenges. That is strong testimony of Afghanistan's aspirations to achieve national unity and stability, which could contribute to regional security. We welcome President Ghani's recent ceasefire initiative and regret that counterparts have not accepted it. That means that hopes for peaceful elections is under threat. We are equally concerned about the statements made by some political parties in Afghanistan that intend to boycott the elections. Therefore, we encourage the Government to work with political parties and encourage them to participate in the elections. On the other hand, it should not lead to a delay in the holding of the elections, as it would lead to further deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan.

On the security track, despite some noteworthy developments, the situation is fragile and volatile and continues to deteriorate, in particular in the northern provinces. Major losses have been incurred among the civilian population, law enforcement and the military as a result of terrorist acts and clashes by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh and the Taliban. It is cause for serious concern as it could have a negative impact on the holding of free and successful elections in the country. We therefore urge the Government to implement its progressive strategies, such as the plan on security sector reform and many others in other areas, which, in our view, will further strengthen the capacity of national institutions.

With regard to international cooperation, my delegation commends the ongoing efforts to counter various threats, including the scourge of terrorism, trafficking and narcotics in Afghanistan. We believe that at this stage it remains imperative that the United Nations and the international community continue to provide assistance to Afghanistan. We will further support the Kabul process, the efforts of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and regional initiatives, as well as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan. We also welcome the work of our partners from Central Asia, in particular the holding of the Tashkent conference in March and the efforts of the Russian Federation on the Moscow format, while underlining the importance of the SCO Afghanistan Contact Group and the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. We have great hopes for the forthcoming Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan, which will ensure that the Government of Afghanistan is on track to deliver on its reform commitments and discuss prospects for international support.

On the development track, we are heartened to see that it is the policy of the Afghan Government's to put emphasis on social and economic development. The core of our efforts is to help Afghanistan become an attractive partner with great potential. In that vein, we believe it is necessary to proceed in line with provisions

of this year's presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/1) on prevention and sustaining peace and the presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) on modelling regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The country needs joint projects, job creation and regional connectivity. All Central Asian States are committed to long-term cooperation with our Afghan partners and intraregional connectivity in the areas of infrastructure, transit and transport, energy and other fields.

It is necessary to ensure that Afghanistan be included in our region's trade and economic cooperation efforts as part of a new model of relations. My delegation therefore proposes a new strategy, based on the interlinkages of development and security, combined with a revamped regional approach and an innovative whole-of-system United Nations approach to enhance efficiency, transparency and accountability. It is based on our assumption that economic development will create the prerequisites for a political settlement and a solution to security issues. In that regard, we support all projects to empower that idea, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline, the Lapis Lazuli Corridor and the One Belt-One Road initiative, which could not only bring about economic growth and prosperity, but could also enhance security and stability in the region. Kazakhstan will continue to contribute to bilateral, regional and multilateral action for the recovery, stability, peace and progress of Afghanistan.

With regard to the human dimension, Kazakhstan is deeply convinced that women, along with youth, occupy a central place in the entire cycle of conflict prevention. In that vein, earlier this month in Astana, we organized a regional conference on the theme "Empowering women in Afghanistan", which focused on achieving sustainable economic growth by expanding the capabilities of Afghan women and developing their business activities through regional cooperation, with emphasis on the role of education and new knowledge. Its outcome declaration envisages ways of improving the living and educational conditions of Afghan women and girls, as well as expanding their rights and opportunities, including in the political and economic spheres. As for results, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and the European Union will soon launch a joint pilot project to provide training for Afghan women in Kazakh and Uzbek universities. In addition, the Government of Kazakhstan has decided to allocate additional scholarships for Afghan women for the period 2019-2020, which is a continuation of Kazakhstan's initiative to educate 1,000 Afghan civilian specialists through a $50 million special educational programme.

The plight of Afghan children remains severely affected by the escalation of the conflict. To that end, the Government of Afghanistan has taken many commendable steps to ensure that its national security forces are child-free. It is also promoting age-assessment guidelines that we hope will be widely implemented. However, Kazakhstan is alarmed about the fact that the current reporting period again recorded a high number of child casualties, with the use of boys who were reportedly recruited by terrorist organizations. We therefore welcome the joint efforts of UNAMA and UNICEF to address that challenge.

Finally, my country is pleased that UNAMA, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community have continued to maintain a close partnership, which is vital to ensuring sustainable peace and stability in the country. Kazakhstan will continue to support the brotherly people of Afghanistan in fulfilling their aspirations for peace, prosperity and security, and believes that the timely holding of parliamentary elections will promote the conditions for achieving such goals.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, allow me to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, and Ambassador Saikal for their enlightening briefings on peace efforts and the electoral process. I would also like to warmly thank Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar for his briefing, which clearly illustrated the essential role played by Afghan youth in building a peaceful, democratic, just and united society. In Afghanistan and elsewhere, young people must be fully recognized as agents of sociopolitical change and as key partners in efforts to bring about peace and development. I will make three points today.

First, with regard to the security situation, the conflict in Afghanistan remains one of the deadliest and most violent on the Security Council's agenda. France is very concerned about the increasing number of foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan, as well as by the one-upmanship of the Taliban and the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province, marked by a recent increase in the number of terrorist attacks, in Kabul in particular. We again condemn such attacks, in the strongest terms, and reiterate our solidarity with the

victims of terrorism and their families. France also commends the courage and the determination of the Afghan forces, who were instrumental in retaking the town of Ghazni on 10 August. Nonetheless, such clashes confirm that terrorist groups are determined to continue their harassment in order to destabilize the country at a critical time, by creating a climate of perpetual insecurity and by seeking to undermine the Afghan forces and the authority of the Government just ahead of the elections.

We are also concerned about the continued increase in drug trafficking, which fuels Taliban insurgency and threatens the lives of thousands of Afghans. The presentation of a draft regional strategy by Afghanistan in July in Vienna marks the renewed commitment of the Afghan authorities to combating opiate production and trafficking, which deserves to be highlighted. We call on the countries of the region to resolutely commit to fighting such trafficking at all levels. We look to the Afghan Government to continue the important efforts needed to curb drug production, with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, regional partners and the international community, within the framework of the principle of shared responsibility, including the Paris Pact Initiative.

Secondly, the parliamentary and local elections scheduled for 20 October constitute a major challenge, given the context that I have just mentioned. France attaches great importance to the democratic process and the holding of free, transparent and credible elections. It is essential that the Afghan population be able to express itself and be represented in the Government. All stakeholders must continue to work to ensure the broadest possible participation of the population in the elections, especially women. We are concerned about the many questions that remain about the preparations for the elections, which may compromise their integrity. We also remain concerned about the low number of candidates in some provinces for district council elections, since a plurality of candidates is an essential criterion for holding credible elections. In that regard, we support the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) alongside the various Afghan stakeholders and the series of measures to combat fraud, promote trust and ensure the inclusivity and security of the elections.

Thirdly, concerning peace efforts, the seriousness of the security situation and the human cost of the conflict should serve to encourage renewed efforts to achieve lasting peace. Progress has been made, notably through the peace offer presented by President Ghani at the second Kabul Conference, on 28 February, and then with the ceasefire for the Eid Al-Fitr holiday and the unilateral Eid Al-Adha ceasefire proposal. France urges the Taliban to respond to those gestures of openness. A lasting solution in Afghanistan can be only political in nature, negotiated through an inclusive Afghan-led process for Afghans. In that respect, it is essential to consult the Afghan population, including young Afghans, in order to take into account their expectations. Beyond Afghanistan, it is important that all States in the region unambiguously support the objective of peace.

The violence and power struggles have lasted far too long. Time for cooperation has come with a view towards peace, democratic good governance and development, which are incumbent upon the Afghan people to achieve, with the support of the international community. The Afghan authorities and UNAMA can count on the steadfast support of France in pursuit of that goal, as well as the unity of the Security Council, which is a critical and indispensable asset to make headway.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing. I am appreciative of the tremendous amount of work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has carried out under his leadership. I listened very attentively to the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Saikal, and by the civil society youth representative, Mr. Bakhtiar.

At present, the political process in Afghanistan has entered a critical stage. The security situation is of great concern, and the humanitarian situation is facing challenges. Peace and development in Afghanistan have important bearing on the vital interests of the Afghan people and the security, stability, development and prosperity of the region. China applauds the efforts of the Afghan Government to safeguard national stability, promote national reconciliation and facilitate economic development. We are appreciative of the Government's unremitting efforts. The international community should continue to provide firm support for Afghanistan.

First, we must provide firm support to ensure that major elections in Afghanistan are held smoothly. Afghanistan will hold parliamentary elections in

October and presidential elections in April of next year. Those will be major events in the political process in Afghanistan. As electoral preparations enter a critical stage, all political parties in Afghanistan should strengthen unity, assume national political stability as a shared responsibility and resolve differences through dialogue and consultations. The international community must truly respect the right of the Afghan people to choose their own political system and development path, and provide tailored assistance to the Afghan Government in order to improve its governance capacity.

Secondly, we must help improve the security situation in Afghanistan. The number of civilian casualties caused by the conflict in Afghanistan reached a record high in the first half of this year. The international community should continue to support the capacity-building of the Afghan National Security Forces, jointly respond effectively to such threats as terrorism, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking and help Afghanistan meet those challenges through efforts at the regional level. The Taliban should be urged to respond positively to the Afghan Government's conditional ceasefire and peace initiative in an effort to achieve lasting peace and stability in the country.

Thirdly, we need to pay greater attention to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and take measures to ease the situation. The recent drought has affected the livelihoods of approximately 1.4 million people in Afghanistan, thereby exacerbating the already grave humanitarian situation. The international community should provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people in terms of, inter alia, industrial and residential water supply, food and medical care, and alleviate the humanitarian plight brought on by the drought. Humanitarian support should continue to be given to Afghan refugees and their host countries.

Fourthly, we must promote Afghanistan's economic development and regional cooperation. Afghanistan boasts rich resources and a strategic geographical location, and there are broad prospects for its participation in regional economic cooperation. The international community, on the basis of Afghanistan's national development strategy and specific needs, should help the country to unlock its development potential and continue to deepen its integration into regional economic cooperation.

The relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council have positively affirmed the importance of the Belt and Road Initiative in the promotion of economic development in Afghanistan and regional cooperation. It is our hope that all the relevant parties will jointly promote the development of the Belt and Road Initiative, strengthen regional economic cooperation and interconnectivity and help Afghanistan achieve its economic and social development. We look forward to positive outcomes at the Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be held in November.

China and Afghanistan enjoy long-standing good neighbourly relations. China hopes that Afghanistan will achieve peace, security, stability and development at an early date. The Qingdao Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) reaffirms that the SCO member States will continue to provide support to the Afghan Government and its people in promoting the political process, safeguarding security, advancing economic development and combating terrorism and narcotics trafficking.

China will continue to strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan and other regional countries through various mechanisms, such as the tripartite dialogue among China, Afghanistan and Pakistan; the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, consisting of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the United States; and the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, in order to jointly respond to terrorist threats and promote regional peace, stability and development.

China will continue to help Afghanistan in leveraging its own strength in its participation in the Belt and Road Initiative and regional economic cooperation. China will also promote the complementarity between the Belt and Road Initiative and other regional cooperation initiatives. Together with the international community, China will work tirelessly to promote an early attainment of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his very informative briefing, as well as for his report on developments in Afghanistan. Special words of gratitude should also be forwarded to the courageous and dedicated team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which supports

governance, development and reconciliation in Afghanistan. I also welcome the presentation made by Ambassador Saikal.

We greatly appreciate the strong motivation and passion demonstrated by Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar in his briefing. The young generation of Afghans embodies hope for the peaceful and sustainable development of the country. The international community should encourage and provide them with effective assistance on their way to a brighter future, without suffering or innocent casualties of violence. When we consider the profound role of the young generation in the reconstruction and development process taking place in Afghanistan, we cannot forget how important it is to allow broad access to education.

Poland reiterates the significance of the peace process, which should be continued through constructive dialogue. In that regard, we recognize President Ghani's numerous efforts aimed at peaceful conflict resolution as an important step forward. We count on the representatives of Taliban groups to respond positively to the offer of peace talks and to take part in an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Having said that, we cannot turn a blind eye to the unspoken suffering of the civilian population, especially the women and children of Ghazni in recent weeks. We call for unrestricted access for humanitarian assistance, which is critically needed. We believe that all parties involved should allow aid workers to ease the pain and tragedy of innocent people affected by military operations. Good governance and successful institution-building require adherence to the rules and the procedures that enable all citizens to participate in the democratic process. Poland welcomes the commitment demonstrated by the Afghan Government to conducting transparent, inclusive and credible parliamentary and district council elections. We note that the initiated process faces such challenges as the low number of candidate nominations. That needs to be overcome by the authorities.

The high priority for us remains the wide participation of women, both as candidates and as voters. We see it as a fundamental condition for enhancing peace and security. Poland calls on the Government of Afghanistan to put a particular focus on challenges to women's participation in the forthcoming parliamentary and district council elections. Efforts need to be undertaken urgently by international partners in order to provide concrete support for women's groups so as to ensure women's full participation in every aspect of the electoral process.

The continued violent acts of hostile insurgent groups reminds us of the fundamental importance of maintaining Afghanistan's institutions, specifically those that have the task of ensuring the security and defence of the country and its people. Poland supports and encourages the Afghan Government to continue its efforts to improve the capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Those undertakings require determination and engagement, which we will continue to support through training and advisory activities in the framework of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.

Finally, Poland is concerned over the continued grave violations against children in conflict. Children comprised more than half of civilian casualties documented by UNAMA in aerial strikes and 25 per cent of all civilian casualties during the reporting period. Attacks on schools and mosques accounted for 75 per cent of election-related security incidents. We call on all parties to cease attacks on and military use of schools, and to end attacks on medical facilities and personnel.

Mr. Alahmad (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar, the Afghanistan youth representative, for their comprehensive briefings today. I would also like to take this opportunity to renew the support of the State of Kuwait for all the sincere efforts exerted by Mr. Yamamoto and the members of UNAMA under the difficult circumstances they face there. I also thank the Secretary-General for his quarterly report (S/2018/824), which sheds light on the situation in Afghanistan over the past three months

This meeting is being convened only one month prior to the holding of the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan. Therefore, I will focus in my statement on two main issues linked to the items we are discussing today, namely, political developments and the security situation.

First, with regard to the political developments, the phase in which Afghanistan is currently passing is a

very critical and delicate one. It is a phase in which we are witnessing intensified consultations among the political parties. We are also witnessing the continued preparations by the electoral management bodies to hold parliamentary elections on 20 October. In that regard, we would like first to commend the vital role of UNAMA and the electoral management bodies in finalizing the lists of voters and candidates and setting up voting centres. We also welcome the signing by the United Nations and the electoral management bodies on 25 July of a revised Electoral Support Project document, with the donors pledging an additional $57 million in financial support.

The overall number of 9 million registered men and women voters is a clear demonstration of the desire of the Afghan people to opt for the path of democracy despite the security threats to their lives. We salute the courage of the Afghan people, who emphasize once again that the political solution in Afghanistan must be Afghan-led and determined by the Afghan people.

As we discuss political developments, we should underscore the importance of national reconciliation and the peace process in Afghanistan. We follow closely the ongoing political action in the various Afghan provinces, and the political alliances that have been formed in order to prepare for the upcoming elections. We hope that such action, which involves all political parties, will contribute to reducing tensions and giving priority to national interests above partisan ones. Strengthening national interests has been and continues to be essential. It is of the utmost importance for the Government and all parties to prioritize long-term interests in order to put an end to the Afghan conflict and achieve sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Likewise, the international community must continue to encourage and support these goals in order to reach a comprehensive political settlement in Afghanistan. We welcome the assistance provided by the countries of the region and the relevant regional mechanisms, especially the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which has convened a special meeting on Afghanistan during the past week to reiterate its support to the Afghani Government to bring peace, security and harmony among all the segments of the Afghani people, including its call to the Taliban movement to get involved in a direct, peaceful and unconditional dialogue.

Secondly, with regard to the security situation, the latest report of the Secretary-General underlines the continued instability of the security situation in Afghanistan. Over the past period, we all witnessed the significant increase in terrorist operations due to the proximity of the parliamentary elections. It is with concern that we have followed the continuing clashes between Afghan forces and armed groups, such as the Taliban movement and the terrorist group Da'esh, the latest of which was an attempt by the Taliban to overrun the city of Ghazni on 10 August. That attempt caused numerous casualties among unarmed civilians, including many women and children.

We are fully aware that increased acts of violence and threats are nothing but desperate attempts by elements that do not believe in democracy or human rights, and do not even wish to see stability and security in the country. They think that through those terrorist acts, which target educational and sports centres as well as gathering places, they will be able to terrorize voters and delay the electoral process next October. We hope that the Afghan authorities will redouble their efforts to protect public utilities and fight those stray groups. At the same time, we welcome the commitment of our NATO allies to support the non-combatant mission and provide financial support to the Afghan forces until the year 2024.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait renews its support to Afghanistan to achieve lasting peace and stability through a diplomatic negotiated settlement. We stand with Afghanistan in its war against terrorism and support its unrelenting efforts to spread its authority and sovereignty over its entire territory. We also emphasize that confronting the threat of terrorism lies in the collective commitment to fight and combat this scourge within the framework of the international strategy to combat terrorism.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2018/824). We would also like to thank the Ambassador of Afghanistan and Mr. Ramiz Bhaktiar, representing Afghan youth, for their excellent briefings.

With one month to go until the legislative and district elections, my delegation welcomes the progress

made by the Independent Election Commission in the implementation of the electoral process, specifically by appointing a new Chief Electoral Officer; finalizing the electoral lists and beginning to digitize them; concluding the receipt candidatures; gender mainstreaming in order to increase women's participation in the elections and adopting measures that will allow the media, civil society and political parties to observe and monitor the elections. Côte d'Ivoire also notes the commitment and efforts of the Independent Electoral Commission and UNAMA to organize the elections in a timely manner. Lastly, we also welcome the financial assistance provided by certain countries to those bodies to ensure the proper implementation of the electoral calendar.

Despite those few major advances, my delegation remains concerned about the sociopolitical and security situation in Afghanistan, which could jeopardize the holding of elections in conditions that would guarantee its smooth functioning and credibility.

With regrd to the sociopolitical situation, as the Independent Electoral Commission is preparing to finalize the digitization of voter lists — an important step for the transparency of the electoral process — its headquarters in Kabul and local commissions in eight other provinces were closed due to events organized by individuals whose candidatures were rejected. Amid those tensions, my country urges the Afghan authorities, political actors and all stakeholders to work together to seek the necessary compromises to hold fair, transparent and credible elections on 20 October in a peaceful environment.

In addition, Côte d'Ivoire notes with regret the limited progress made in the implementation of the peace agreement between the Government and the Hezb-e Islami political party. We are concerned about the negative effects that those delays could have on the start of negotiations for a peace agreement with armed groups in the country.

The deteriorating security situation resulting from the Taliban attacks on the Afghan security forces and those by the local branch of Islamic State against the civilian population could jeopardize the participation of many Afghans in the upcoming polls. It is therefore important to strengthen support for the efforts of the Afghan security forces from the international community and the countries contributing to the NATO Resolute Support Mission in order to address the threats posed by armed groups and curb the level of violence in the country. In that regard, my delegation notes with satisfaction the commitment of the contributing countries to the Resolute Support Mission to maintain their presence in the country — if need be — as well as their funding pledges for the Afghan security forces up until 2024. We encourage all forces engaged in Afghanistan to further strengthen joint operations with the country's defence and security forces in the provinces most affected by insecurity, where the conduct of elections is at risk of being undermined.

Some recent positive developments are helping to maintain hope for the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan. They include the cessation of hostilities between the Afghan armed forces and the Taliban during Eid al-Fitr festivities; meetings between Taliban leaders and Afghan political authorities during that period; the meeting of 3,000 religious leaders in Kabul to call the Taliban to the negotiating table with the Afghan political authorities; the increased involvement of civil society in the search for peace through demonstrations and marches and the pooling of initiatives within the framework of regional cooperation to promote the quest for solutions to the Afghan crisis.

Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the adoption of the Afghan national peace and reconciliation strategy presented by the High Peace Council, as well as the measures taken by the Government of Afghanistan to implement the national action plan on peace, security and women's empowerment.

My country welcomes the progress made by the Afghan Government in its fight against corruption and its quest to reduce the dependence of its economy on foreign aid. We also encourage it to continue its efforts to combat drug trafficking, which serves as a source of financing for terrorism.

My delegation also calls for enhanced cooperation between the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the relevant regional organizations in order to strengthen regional capacities for peace and development.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms the central role of the Kabul process, which remains to this day the benchmark for achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We would like to thank the Secretary General for his comprehensive

report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2018/824) and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We appreciate the briefing by Special Representative Yamamoto and are grateful to Ambassador Saikal and Mr. Bakhtiar for their remarks.

There is no doubt that Afghanistan still faces multiple and complex challenges to its security, stability and development. Its people continue to pay a heavy price for the instability and violence, not least from the use of indiscriminate improvised explosive devices — the leading cause of civilian casualties during the first half of this year. We reiterate our strong condemnation of the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul and other parts of the country. Once again, we must take this opportunity to express our sympathy and solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan for the loss of a high number of civilian lives.

The long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation and political process. We reiterate our appreciation for the proposal by President Ghani for direct negotiations with the Taliban. We note that it has been receiving broad and strong support from Afghans and the international community. However, that will not make any difference unless and until the Taliban accepts the offer and engages in direct peace talks without any preconditions.

The holding of peaceful and democratic parliamentary and district council elections within the proposed time frame is indeed important, as Special Representative Yamamoto said. The peaceful conduct of any electoral process is critical to enabling people to exercise their right to vote freely, without fear or threat of insecurity, but implementing an inclusive and credible electoral process in that context remains a challenge.

There has certainly been progress in the preparation for the elections, but there is a need to accelerate those efforts and build confidence in the electoral process through the involvement and participation of all relevant stakeholders. That is key to ensuring the timely and successful holding of the elections. All Afghan stakeholders have very important responsibilities in that regard. We hope they will demonstrate the necessary political will and commitment to contribute their part for the sake of lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The peace and security challenge faced by Afghanistan cannot be effectively addressed without sustained and inclusive economic growth and development. That is why the National Unity Government needs the coordinated and comprehensive support of the international community. We must provide every support to encourage and assist the Government in its political reforms and the national development priorities laid out in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. It is vital that the international community sustain its engagement and deliver on its commitments. We sincerely hope that the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan will provide an opportunity for the international community to renew its political commitments to Afghanistan and encourage their implementation.

The continued engagement of the United Nations in support of Afghanistan is absolutely vital at this critical juncture. We commend UNAMA's active engagement with the Government and the people of Afghanistan, in line with its mandate. We hope it will continue to maintain and extend its efforts to promote and support peace talk initiatives, reconciliation and dialogue, as well as its support for the social and economic development of Afghanistan.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and for the important work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in Afghanistan.

I would also like to thank Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar for sharing his valuable insights this afternoon. With more than 60 per cent of the population in Afghanistan estimated to be under 25-years old, the future clearly lies in the hands of the youth. In line with resolution 2419 (2018), on youth, peace and security, young people should be actively and meaningfully engaged in all decision-making processes, including in the Council.

The only viable solution to the conflict in Afghanistan is an Afghan-owned and -led peace process. In that regard, we commend the unprecedented steps taken by the Afghan Government this year. It is deeply regrettable that the Taliban did not accept the offer of a bilateral ceasefire, and we join others in urging the Taliban to cease all violence and to immediately engage in talks with the Government. A peace process must be inclusive, involving both women and youth, if any agreement is to be sustainable.

As stated by others, the upcoming elections will be decisive for the future of Afghanistan. The ability to ensure credible elections will be a test of the Afghan reform agenda and is crucial for achieving long-term stability and for strengthening democracy. It is a shared responsibility of the Government, the opposition and the electoral management bodies to create the necessary conditions. Responsible institutions must address unresolved preparatory issues without further delay. Any attempt to obstruct the electoral management bodies from carrying out their work is unacceptable. Adequate security measures need to be taken to prevent attacks on the elections and the electoral preparations. Women and men must be able to safely run for elected office, campaign freely and, of course, vote. Special attention should be given to ensuring that women in remote and rural areas are also able to vote. UNAMA has a clear mandate to promote women's participation, and we encourage close cooperation with relevant actors, including UN-Women, in this work.

Coherent and coordinated international support for national peace efforts in Afghanistan is critical. All stakeholders, especially the neighbours, must now act on their commitment to supporting a political solution. The role of UNAMA in backing those efforts remains important. The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in November will be an important opportunity to bring key stakeholders together. The Conference should focus on evaluating the reform agenda that has been mutually agreed by Afghanistan and the international community, including the conduct of the parliamentary elections, anti-corruption efforts and the implementation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of Council resolution 1325 (2000).

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is worsening. Due to conflict and drought, about 4.2 million people now need humanitarian assistance. The situation has also led to an increase in internally displaced people. Safe and unhindered access is critical. It is also essential to ensure close coordination between humanitarian and development efforts, including on climate-change mitigation.

The continuous, horrendous attacks in Kabul and around the country, including targeted attacks on girls' schools, religious minorities and journalists, must be condemned in the strongest terms. All attacks on civilians, including those against humanitarian and development workers, are unacceptable. All parties must comply with their obligations under international law. In that context, UNAMA's continued documentation of civilian casualties is important.

With continuous attacks on civilians and a worsening humanitarian situation, the challenges in Afghanistan can sometimes seem overwhelming. But renewed momentum for a peace process and the upcoming elections offer opportunities to change the trajectory. We should jointly seize that opportunity. As a long-standing friend and partner to the people of Afghanistan, Sweden will continue to do its part.

The President: I will now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the United States.

We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and are particularly grateful to Afghan youth representative Ramiz Bakhtiar for sharing the critical and important perspective of youth and civil society in Afghanistan, and especially regarding the upcoming elections.

Last week, a man wearing a vest armed with explosives walked into a crowd protesting a corrupt local police commander in eastern Afghanistan. The man blew himself up and killed around 70 other people. Hundreds more were wounded. Earlier that same day, a 14-year-old boy was killed and four others were wounded when two bombs went off in front of a school in Jalalabad.

This is the dangerous and difficult situation that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the people of Afghanistan confront as Afghanistan approaches parliamentary elections in October. Violent extremist groups are attempting to sow fear and distrust among the Afghan people. No doubt, their attacks will intensify. It seems they would like to return to the zero-sum, tribal violence of the civil war in the 1990s, which paved the way for the tyrannical rule of the Taliban.

The United States fully supports and hopes for timely, credible, and transparent parliamentary elections in Afghanistan on 20 October, as well as subsequent elections when the Afghan people will choose their president in April 2019. But timely and credible elections will not come about easily. Building a democracy necessarily involves creating trust and confidence among the people in the integrity of the system, along with belief in the ability and willingness of those who are elected to improve the lives of the people. As a first step in that process, there must be

voter registration that is as accurate and transparent as possible, ensuring that women have the opportunity to participate and have their voices heard. And most fundamentally, it depends on the safety of those who would campaign, register and vote in the elections.

Today, preparations for the parliamentary and presidential elections in Afghanistan are at a critical stage. UNAMA plays an essential role in supporting Afghanistan's electoral commissions as they prepare for the vote. We want to specifically recognize and thank Special Representative Yamamoto and his team for their hard work under very difficult conditions. As part of the preparation for timely and credible elections, the United States welcomes the efforts of the Afghan Government to advance a peace process with the Taliban. The people of Afghanistan are calling for peace. President Ghani has responded to their call. The ball is now in the Taliban's court. They must come to the table and enter into peace talks without preconditions.

The Taliban face a decision — they can grow obsolete in the old Afghanistan or they can thrive in a new one. Not just the Taliban, but all of us, are at an inflection point in the Afghan conflict. A prosperous and secure future for Afghanistan can be created only by and through the will of its people. This is the goal to which the Security Council, international donors and the international community more broadly must devote themselves in the critical weeks and months ahead.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing, and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for his statement. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/824).

Today we are meeting at yet another critical juncture for Afghanistan. As we approach the midpoint of the transformation decade, significant progress in the country has been achieved on multiple fronts, including in the political, economic and security fields. However, complex challenges remain to be addressed for the establishment and consolidation of peace, security and prosperity in Afghanistan. We look forward to the holding of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan later this year, which will provide an important opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its commitment to assisting Afghanistan in its efforts to secure a better future. This afternoon, I will focus on three key issues in this regard.

First, with regard to the upcoming elections in the country, we are about one month away from the holding of parliamentary elections in Afghanistan, which are scheduled for 20 October. The successful holding of these elections is important for all of our efforts aimed at helping Afghanistan achieve stability, security and prosperity. However, severe and frequent criticism of the election process is becoming a source of concern, as this may lead to circumstances that could result in the disenfranchisement of a large number of voters. The deteriorating security situation might also give way to similar results. We still hope that effective and swift measures will be taken to rectify this situation.

The fragmented political environment in Afghanistan continues to be another point of concern. We call upon all members of the National Unity Government, as well as other prominent political actors, to act together and join efforts aimed at holding credible elections and advancing the peace process.

That brings me to my second point, on the efforts for establishing sustained peace and reconciliation. An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process remains central to achieving long-lasting peace in the country. We welcome the encouraging steps that were recently taken by the Afghan Government to this effect. In this regard, we were pleased that the temporary ceasefire during Eid al-Fitr was respected. This unprecedented development vividly displayed the sincere aspiration of the Afghan people for peace. It is regrettable that a similar ceasefire could not be repeated during Eid al-Adha. I would like to reiterate that Turkey continues to stand ready to contribute to the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation efforts. The security, stability and prosperity of Afghanistan are of key importance for neighbouring countries and the region, as well as for the maintenance of global peace and security.

My third and last point is on the need to strengthen regional cooperation efforts. We believe that the need to address the challenges that Afghanistan continues to face remains an important priority for countries of the region and the international community as a whole. Building and consolidating a genuine atmosphere of trust

and cooperation remains essential for strengthening regional collaboration efforts in a mutually beneficial manner. Our vision for Afghanistan continues to be a peaceful, secure and stable country that enjoys good and cooperative relations with its neighbours while being at the centre of major regional cooperation projects in infrastructure, trade and transportation.

With this understanding, Turkey continues to contribute to regional cooperation efforts for Afghanistan. We are pleased to co-chair the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process this year, together with Afghanistan, in line with our continued support. The second senior officials meeting of the Process will take place here in New York on 28 September, at the margins of the high-level week of the General Assembly. Review of the implementation of the confidence-building measures within the framework of the Process will be one of the agenda items. We look forward to a fruitful discussion at this meeting.

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is carrying out under the leadership of Special Representative Yamamoto in assisting the Afghan Government and people in their endeavours to achieve a stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan. I would also like to reiterate Turkey's commitment to continuing to stand by the Government of Afghanistan and our Afghan brothers and sisters as long as our help is needed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): I, too, should like to begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing.

The situation in Afghanistan remains a source of concern for the entire international community. A long war continues, exacerbated by terrorism, ethnic and regional tensions, and a fragile economy. The Afghan people continue their epic suffering, with another record-high period in civilian casualties, attested by the Secretary General's report (S/2018/824). As Human Rights Watch put it, "civilians are losing the war in Afghanistan". The recent upsurge in violence has compounded the prolonged suffering of the Afghan people. We strongly condemn all terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. There can be no justification for the indiscriminate killing of innocent children, women and men.

Apart from Afghanistan itself, no country has suffered more from the four decades of war, turmoil and foreign interventions in Afghanistan, and no country has more to gain from peace there, than mine, Pakistan. For many years, Imran Khan, Pakistan's recently elected Prime Minister, has declared that peace in Afghanistan can be restored only through a negotiated political settlement between the principal parties. In his very first address to the nation after the elections, Prime Minister Khan reaffirmed Pakistan's support for peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was also the first country to be visited by Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Hussain Qureshi over the last weekend, which is a clear signal of the importance that our new Government attaches to its relations with Afghanistan and of its commitment to promoting peace and stability in that country. His message in Kabul was that Pakistan remained ready to play a constructive role in facilitating peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

There are some signs that a negotiated end to Afghanistan's protracted war may be possible. Hopes for peace received a boost last June when President Ashraf Ghani announced a ceasefire on the religious festival of Eid al-Fitr, and the Afghan Taliban did the same. For a few days, the ceasefire was comprehensively observed across the country by the Government and the Tehrik-e Taliban Afghanistan. Apart from the general desire for peace, the ceasefire affirmed that peace was possible if the principal parties in Afghanistan desired it.

Pakistan welcomes the Trump Administration's acknowledgement that a negotiated political settlement is the best option for bringing its longest war to an end. Pakistan has urged this course of action for well over a decade. The United Nations and the international community have consistently declared that there is no military solution to the conflict and that it must be ended through a negotiated political settlement.

Agreement on launching a negotiating process is, however, neither simple nor easy. Several past attempts have been aborted by unilateral actions. There is little trust between the main antagonists. Preconditions have been set by some of the main parties to commence and continue a dialogue process. The principal responsibility for seizing the moment rests on the parties directly involved in the Afghan conflict. Unless they display flexibility, serious negotiations for a political settlement could be further delayed. To create

an environment for peace talks, all sides should agree on a de-escalation of violence, if not a cessation of violence. For its part, Pakistan will actively encourage, support and facilitate all efforts to launch a credible and serious peace process.

A negotiated peace and national reconciliation is all the more essential to enable the Afghan people and the international community to confront and eliminate the growing presence of Da'esh in Afghanistan. Da'esh and a number of terrorist groups operating under its umbrella, including the Tehrik-i-Taliban and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, pose a threat to Afghanistan, its neighbours and, indeed, to the world. We agree with the Russian delegation that an international effort is needed to defeat Da'esh in Afghanistan.

Cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is a vital component of the endeavour to realize peace and security within Afghanistan and the entire region. Strengthening bilateral relations is a priority for my country's new Government. The Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity provides a framework for comprehensive and structured engagement between our two countries. The inaugural session of that body was held in Kabul in July, and the operationalization of its five working groups will enable us address all bilateral issues, including broadening economic interaction, border management and refugee repatriation.

We have taken a number of initiatives to support Afghanistan's economic development. At Kabul's request, Pakistan waived regulatory duties on imports from Afghanistan. As a result, a substantial increase in Afghan exports to Pakistan has been recorded in 2018.

We are also ready to extend all possible support to Kabul to overcome the growing challenge posed by illicit drug production and trade. The international community, too, should do more to help Afghanistan in developing a comprehensive strategy to address that problem.

Finally, let me say that the bonds of blood, language, faith, geography and history that bind the peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan to each other are immutable and unbreakable. Our destinies are, and will always remain, intertwined. Cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is in the mutual and vital interests of both countries. We stand committed to working with the Afghan Government for the improvement of our bilateral relationship and for the promotion of peace and stability — in both our countries and across the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Arbeiter (Canada): I would first like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his informative briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. I also express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar for his briefing. I now follow him on Twitter, and so I know that today was both exciting and nerve-wracking for him, but I must tell him that I hope we live up to his expectations and, by extension, to the aspirations of all Afghan youth.

I will cover three points today: the situation of youth, the Geneva Ministerial Conference and the upcoming parliamentary elections.

With regard to youth, Canada commends the Security Council for having focused this quarterly debate on this topic. As many other have noted, in a country where over 60 per cent of the population is under the age of 25, involving young people and including their views in identifying solutions is more important than ever. If Canada is elected to serve on the Security Council for the period 2021-2022, we can be counted upon to support a continued and expanded effort to regularly include youth voices in such debates. In Afghanistan, it is clear that equitable access to social services, including education, remains an essential component of supporting youth. That is especially important for girls and young people from ethnic and religious minorities.

The progress made since 2001 in terms of child enrolment in schools is nothing short of remarkable. Nevertheless, approximately 4 million children, most of them girls, remain outside of school today. Their enormous untapped potential prompted the Afghan Ministry of Education to work with Canada and other donors to develop a community-based policy that increases access to education in rural and remote locations. Leading that policy, Canada is proud to have helped establish more than 9,200 community-based schools serving 273,000 students, over 80 per cent of whom are girls.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada looks forward to participating in the forthcoming Geneva Ministerial Conference on

Afghanistan, to be held in November, and will be paying keen attention to the Afghan Government's own assessment of progress made to date and its planned approach to address remaining obstacles. We hope to hear more about how they intend to continue increasing the participation of women in public affairs and reducing gender-based violence. We hope to learn more about the implementation of its policies to strengthen budget transparency and increase Government accountability, especially in the security sector. And we eagerly await an update on its efforts to enhance Government capacity to deliver services and ensure good governance. All of those areas will be critical for the success of the transformation decade.

The forthcoming parliamentary elections are another important milestone. It was my personal privilege to be in Afghanistan ahead of the historic presidential elections in 2004 and to help organize training for staff of the new Afghan Parliament in 2006. I met many incredible volunteers, officials and politicians from across Afghanistan and was struck then, as now, by the depth of their commitment to their country and the remarkable diversity of their perspective and experience.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada remains fully committed to supporting Afghanistan as it seeks to leverage that diversity, including by advancing the full participation of women and marginalized communities in the upconubg elections. As is the case everywhere, women's full and equal participation in decision-making processes strengthens both the processes and the decisions themselves, leading to better, more sustainable results. In that regard, I commend the Independent Election Commission for its gender policy and for its concrete efforts to enhance women's political participation. I also want to cite the tremendous efforts of civil society actors like the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan and the Afghan Women's Education Center for promoting the rights of women and girls and of ethnic and religious minorities.

We likewise welcome the work of the United Nations and other partners to distribute ballots in rural areas ahead of the elections. We encourage the Afghan national authorities to continue to actively address irregularities and to promote and protect the rights of those in rural communities, especially women candidates and voters, to participate in civic affairs and political life. Their inclusion is essential to the integrity of the elections.

As Afghanistan approaches the half-way mark of its transformation decade, the Secretary-General is right to point to the urgent need for political leaders to demonstrate unity of purpose in guiding Afghanistan towards greater stability and self-reliance. We look to the Afghan Government to lead, as no doubt do Afghanistan's young people. Canada will continue to work with the Afghan Government, our United Nations and international partners and with civil society in this effort — because we know that, by working together, we can help young people like Mr. Bakhtiar build a peaceful, inclusive and resilient Afghanistan, which he embodies so vividly for us all.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I thank the United States presidency for having convened the present debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I also thank Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for his thoughtful presentation; young Ramiz Bakhtiar, the first youth envoy of Afghanistan, for his passionate call to the Security Council to support the aspirations of Afghanistan's young people; and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, for his briefing.

The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/824) and the statements made earlier today portray the deteriorating security situation resulting from the growing insurgency, linked with criminal and terrorist networks. The challenges posed by the deteriorating situation do not mean we should simply accept the death toll as inevitable. Rather, they should stir us to strengthen our collective spirit of support to the Government and the people of Afghanistan and the brave Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to counter the inhumanity of those who have banded together to ruthlessly brutalize the lives of the ordinary people of Afghanistan.

The Security Council deals with multiple conflict situations. Many of them are addressed many times over each quarter. The situation in Afghanistan, by any measure, now warrants that the business-as-usual approach followed to date be reviewed. The Council's manner of addressing the issue through quarterly debates and an annual resolution may have served the purpose in the past. The present situation

requires greater attention to examine whether it is commensurate with the danger to regional peace and security emanating from the conflict in Afghanistan.

During the past few months, we have followed with hope and anticipation the various peace efforts and overtures by the Government and people of Afghanistan towards bringing peace to their war-torn country. The Taliban, unfortunately, have rejected the recent calls for a ceasefire by the Afghan Government and civil society, including various religious leaders. In fact, they have tended to treat such overtures with growing disdain and have increased their offensive operations as the country prepares for parliamentary elections.

All of us know and believe that there is no military solution to the issue. Yet the Taliban, aided by its supporters, continue to pursue military operations and to perpetrate violence and destruction, such as the recent attack in Ghazni, over several parts of Afghanistan. Those offensives are planned and launched by those who are harboured in safe havens in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan. Those sanctuaries have provided safety for years for the dark agendas of ideologically and operationally fused terror networks like the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Da'esh, Al-Qaida and its proscribed affiliates, such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The agendas of those organizations draw financial sustenance not only from extortion and forced levies and taxes, but also benefit significantly from criminal networks operating drug cartels and stealing Afghanistan's natural resources. By some estimates, 60 per cent of the Taliban's revenues are from the drug trade. Poppy cultivation is said to be the largest cash crop in Taliban-controlled areas.

Resolution 2405 (2018), adopted earlier this year, focuses on linkages among extremism, terrorism, drug production and illegal exploitation of Afghanistan's natural resources. However, it falls short of expectations in striving to cripple the Taliban's drug trade. The Secretary-General's current report also fails to address that very key issue in an adequate matter.

Let us not forget that templates are available for curbing illicit trade by terrorist networks. For example, it is estimated that, when targeted, the Islamic State's oil revenues fell over by nearly 90 per cent over three years, from a monthly high of $50 million to just $4 million. By contrast, the opium produced in Taliban-controlled areas is estimated to account for 85 per cent of global illicit production, valued between $1.5 billion and $3 billion. We feel it is time for the Council to try to replicate the success of the international community against the Islamic State's illicit business in Syria and Iraq by similarly crippling the Taliban's illicit drug trade. We hope that this important subject will be addressed by the Secretary-General in his next report, and by the Council thereafter.

India is willing to work with all countries in the region and beyond, while keeping Afghan priorities at the forefront, so as to bring about a lasting solution for the situation. Afghans should lead those efforts, not only between Governments but with civil society and business as stakeholders. India stands ready to support Afghanistan in every way it can. Our focus remains on the economic pillar of stability and reliable connectivity for the people of Afghanistan. We strongly believe that the lack of connectivity directly impacts the economic, security and political situation in Afghanistan, and we want to address that crucial issue for the benefit of the Afghan people.

For its part, it is time for the Council to look beyond routine consideration to chart a more innovative way forward, so that the spiral of violence that is affecting the life of common Afghans is reversed.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/804), and Special Representative Yamamoto and Afghan youth representative Bakthiar for their briefings. I also thank our good friend Ambassador Saikal for his statement.

The political and security landscape has witnessed many changes since President Ghani's unprecedented peace offer at the meeting of the Kabul process in February. The European Union has wholeheartedly welcomed the Kabul initiative, which has greatly increased the chance of the holding of talks led by the Afghan Government on a genuine peace process.

President Ghani's offer of a ceasefire in mid-June generated additional momentum for peace and showed every Afghan and the entire world that peace is possible. Grassroots movements for peace were another manifestation of the Afghan desire for peace and stability.

Unfortunately, in recent weeks we have observed an increase in violence, including the Taliban's attack on Ghazni. That resulted in further suffering for the Afghan population. The Taliban also registered substantial numbers of casualties in different provinces, underlining the tremendous costs of a strategy that seeks advantage in the battlefield rather than entering peace talks. Reckless spoilers of peace also remain active, in particular the Islamic State.

The European Union remains a steadfast supporter and promoter of peace. We will continue to help broaden the political consensus for peace by cooperating closely with the United Nations, whose assistance and facilitation remain essential. The European Union reiterates its willingness to actively accompany that process, while underlining in particular the regional dimension of any successful peace process. A stable and prosperous Afghanistan is in the interests of all its neighbours. The EU will consider all available incentives and constraints to help foster such a development.

We are now looking forward to the Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan. In the spirit of the Brussels Conference of 2016, we expect Geneva to be another key moment in support for the Afghan Government's reform agenda and to send a strong message on peace. The Afghan Government must demonstrate progress on the implementation of the reform package it committed to during the Brussels Conference. We also look forward to the Geneva mutual accountability framework, which should set concrete and measurable indicators for further reforms. All those reforms are consubstantial with peace efforts.

Peace, self-reliance and regional cooperation and connectivity should be our guiding principles at Geneva. We see in particular the need to agree on lasting anti-corruption measures, for which we look forward to an updated set of concrete and measurable indicators. In the same vein, we will emphasize credible implementing measures on human rights, reinforcing relevant legislation.

In July, the EU disbursed the second tranche of the State Building Contract for Afghanistan — in the amount of €98 million. We hope that will contribute to further advancing economic growth and job creation for the benefit of the Afghan people.

On 20 October, Afghanistan will organize parliamentary elections. It is an important event, long-awaited by the Afghan population. Those elections must take place in a democratic, transparent and credible way. It will also be a test case for the presidential elections in 2019. We encourage the Afghan authorities to continue improving the electoral governance system. Much remains to be done, both at the technical level and in the political sphere. With regard to the latter, the EU calls on all parties and political representatives to respect the electoral process and its institutions.

The EU and its member States will continue to work together in support of the Afghan electoral process. We have committed €15.5 million to assist with the parliamentary elections under the coordination of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The EU will also deploy an election experts mission for the parliamentary elections.

We applaud the readiness of the Afghan Government to engage on all youth-related matters, including in the light of the implementation of resolution 2419 (2018), on youth and peace and security. Considering the needs of that most sizeable age group, the youth perspective deserves the fullest attention, including in terms of political participation.

The European Union continues its structured dialogue with Afghanistan under the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development. We are following up on the results of the meeting of the EU-Afghanistan Special Working Group on Human Rights, Good Governance and Migration held on 5 May in Kabul. We encourage the Afghan authorities to continue to implement the relevant legislation, with particular focus on areas such as the elimination of violence against women, the use of the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), the protection of children and the prevention of torture and ill treatment.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the high level of civilian casualties and the increasing number of displaced people. The EU calls on all parties to protect the civilian population, especially women and children. In that regard, we support efforts by the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission to provide further training, advice and assistance for the Afghan

security forces and institutions. We need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable.

In conclusion, this is a very important moment for Afghanistan. We should not lose the positive momentum for peace generated in June. The three-month conditional ceasefire proposed by President Ghani in August is still valid. We encourage all parties to the conflict, starting with the Taliban, to respond positively.

Lastly, the European Union strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by UNAMA and all United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people. The European Union remains committed to working alongside UNAMA and international partners to achieve a democratic and self-sustainable Afghanistan.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement just made on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to comment briefly on three points: the peace process, elections and the role of Afghan youth. However, first of all, allow me to thank Special Representative Yamamoto, not only for his briefing, but also for his tireless efforts to bring about peace in Afghanistan.

I would also like to express our deepest condolences to the Afghan people and their Government following the recent terrorist attacks. In particular, I condemn the recent wave of horrific attacks on schools and children. Impunity for the perpetrators of such crimes is out of the question.

First of all, with regard to the peace process, the Kabul process, supported by the Tashkent conference, must form the basis for a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled peace process. It is essential that the international community and the countries of the region provide coordinated support to the Government's efforts. In that regard, we also welcome the recent progress made on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, as well as the support expressed by Prime Minister Khan of Pakistan following his recent election.

Despite the recent and courageous peace initiatives taken by President Ghani and his National Unity Government, violence continues unabated. There have never been so many civilian casualties since 2009. We deplore the fact that the Taliban leaders have not responded positively to the Government's overtures. We call on them to participate in peace negotiations. In addition, we are also deeply concerned about the lack of humanitarian access.

With regard to the elections, Belgium commends the Government on its substantial efforts to organize free, credible and inclusive elections to be held on 20 October. We commend the people of Afghanistan for having the courage to register for the elections despite the major security challenges. We welcome the considerable efforts of the electoral authorities to ensure the transparency of the process and call for close and constructive cooperation among the Government, opposition parties and the Independent Election Commission. Political leaders are responsible for helping to build trust in the process. Belgium calls on the Taliban not to sabotage the electoral process through violence or other forms of intimidation. With regard to inclusiveness, we note that women account for approximately 15 per cent of the candidates for the lower house of Parliament and 34 per cent of the 9.5 million registered voters. We welcome the approval of the Independent Election Commission's gender policy and hope that it will lead to greater number of women participating in the process.

Insecurity, poverty and unemployment continue to have a serious impact on Afghan youth. Drought has affected livelihoods and led to additional population displacements. The impatience of the Afghan people, in particular their youth, for lasting peace is becoming increasingly clear. Recent civil society initiatives demonstrate the willingness and constructive spirit of young Afghans, who are increasingly calling for lasting peace and are ready to assume their responsibility during the elections. I again deplore the recent attacks on schools, which infringe upon the fundamental right of young people to education and demonstrate the importance of the swift and full implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration. Belgium welcomes the criminalization of child-related offences in the new penal code. The measure is essential for protecting the most vulnerable members of society. Belgium calls on the Afghan Government to implement the new legislation. We are also very concerned about the use of child soldiers and reports of the sexual abuse of boys and of violence against women.

In conclusion, we attach great importance to peace in Afghanistan, its economic prosperity and relations with its neighbours and the rest of the world. Like our European partners, we will follow developments with interest and attention in the coming months.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Ms. Zappia (Italy): Italy fully aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/824), and to Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing and dedication. I would also like to recognize Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar and thank him for sharing his experience and perspective with us. We, too, will start following him on Twitter.

Italy supports the ongoing efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to defeat terrorism and violent extremism. We remain concerned about the continuing fragility of the security situation and the alarming number of civilian casualties. Together with its allies and partners, Italy has renewed its active commitment to the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission as a Framework Nation and will also remain one of the main contributors to capacity-building efforts in support of the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces. Such commitments are underscored by the shared understanding that the only road to lasting peace in Afghanistan is through reconciliation leading to a political settlement. We commend the Government's courageous initiative in that regard, which we fully support. However, the fact that the most recent ceasefire was not reciprocated by the Taliban demonstrates that the road to peace is still long. Efforts to bring about peace in Afghanistan will require patience, determination and unity of purpose.

We underline once again the crucial facilitation efforts of international and, especially, regional stakeholders, who can help foster the conditions for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process. The Government's efforts to advance reconciliation are taking place against a backdrop full of significant milestones in Afghanistan, with parliamentary elections on 20 October and presidential elections in 2019. It has been eight years since the last parliamentary elections. We cannot overstate the importance that the men and women of Afghanistan be able to cast their vote in a credible, transparent and inclusive manner. We hope that all political forces will remain fully engaged in that process, and we support the active involvement of civil society groups in ensuring that the vote is free and fair.

The Government's commitments in the electoral sphere are part of the broader efforts to effectively implement much-needed reforms in a wide range of areas, such as women's empowerment, good governance and anti-corruption. In pursuing the reform agenda, the needs and the potential of Afghan youth must be fully taken into consideration. Evaluating the progress on that reform agenda will be the cornerstone of the Geneva Ministerial Conference in November. Italy looks forward to the conference as an opportunity to draw a comprehensive assessment of the state of play in the partnership for peace and prosperity agreed between the Government of Afghanistan and the international donors two years ago in Brussels.

In closing, allow me to reiterate Italy's appreciation for the exceptional work carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, under Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto's leadership, in an environment that continues to pose numerous challenges.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening the quarterly debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as well as Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar for their briefings.

In Uzbekistan we are continuing to closely follow the situation in Afghanistan, given the upcoming parliamentary elections, because the prospects of stable and sustainable development in Central Asia are directly intertwined with the achievement of durable peace in that country. Given the circumstances, Uzbekistan strives to make its own contribution to the international community's efforts in advancing the peace process in Afghanistan. As some of my colleagues have mentioned today, Uzbekistan hosted an international conference on Afghanistan in March, entitled "Afghanistan: Peace Process, Security Cooperation And Regional Connectivity", which was convened at the joint initiative of Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani.

At the end of the conference, high-ranking officials from 21 States and leading international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, adopted the Tashkent Declaration, which calls for the full support of the international community for the Afghan Government's proposal to launch direct negotiations with the Taliban, without any preconditions, in an effort to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement.

The participants in the conference urged the Taliban to accept that proposal and to start an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. It was specifically underlined that all parties would benefit from a comprehensive peace process, which should also guarantee the inclusion of the Taliban in the political process as a legitimate political player. In turn, the Taliban movement should recognize its own responsibility for peace and stability in the country, renounce violence and cut ties with international terrorists groups, as well as respect equal rights for all Afghans, in accordance with the main provisions of the Constitution.

As a practical step in facilitating a peace process in Afghanistan and in implementing the Tashkent Declaration, the Uzbek side recently held negotiations with representatives of the Taliban from the movement's Qatar-based political commission. During the meeting held in Tashkent on 7 August, the Uzbek side underlined the importance of enforcing a ceasefire and its extension for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as the implementation of large-scale economic projects in the country.

One should underline that Uzbekistan closely coordinates with the highest leadership of Afghanistan all of its efforts pertaining to negotiations and contacts with the Taliban movement. The Uzbek side conducts prior consultations with the Afghan authorities on its meetings or negotiations with the Taliban and informs them about their outcomes. In particular, on 28 August a delegation of Uzbekistan, led by Minister for Foreign Affairs Abdulaziz Kamilov, visited Afghanistan and held a number of meetings, including with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib and Deputy Foreign Minister Nasir Andisha. The Afghan side has been fully briefed on the outcomes of the Tashkent negotiations with the Taliban.

From Uzbekistan's perspective, contacts with the Taliban are a necessary prerequisite to creating conditions for the peace process in Afghanistan and to encouraging the Taliban to take up direct talks with the Government. In Tashkent, we strongly believe that peace in Afghanistan can be achieved only through national reconciliation, with the involvement in the negotiation process of the representatives of the Taliban movement.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to emphasize that ultimate peace on Afghan soil would open up new opportunities and bring real benefits to all States of the greater Eurasian continent. It would advance common security and stability, create conditions favourable to the construction of highways and railroads, the laying of pipelines and the development of regional and transregional trade, thereby contributing to ensuring peace and stability in that vast region.

Uzbekistan will therefore continue its efforts to support the earliest launch of the peace process between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement, without any preconditions, aimed at creating a peaceful future for all people of Afghanistan. In that regard, Uzbekistan remains committed to continue close collaboration with the United Nations, the Government of Afghanistan and other stakeholders in advancing the peace process in the country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

In my own statement, I would like to focus on three issues in particular.

First, I would like to speak on the elections, as so many previous speakers have done. Preparations are taking place amid enormous challenges in terms of logistics, security and the political climate. For the first time, Afghan institutions are taking on those challenges on their own, and thanks to their efforts, preparations are largely on track today — at least in a technical sense, as we learned in the briefing — despite all obstacles. It is crucial that those parliamentary elections, which have been postponed several times, do take place. Equally important is that they must be held in a timely, free, fair and transparent manner. The Afghan people deserve no less, just as they deserve

more progress in fighting corruption, establishing the rule of law and respecting human rights.

Secondly, with respect to the peace process, with its offer of unconditional talks and the unprecedented June ceasefire, the Afghan Government has shown great courage for the sake of peace, even while the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are putting their lives at risk to defend Afghan citizens against attacks every day. Those acts of statesmanship on the part of President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah command our respect. Efforts should now be focused on initiating direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. Confidence-building measures, such as ceasefires, are useful, but the Taliban must not be allowed to garner international credit while running away from the negotiating table.

The countries of the region, many of which have already spoken today, can contribute greatly. In particular, the policy statements issued by the new Pakistani Government have raised hopes. We have seen some encouraging signs. There is now an opportunity to end the conflict in Afghanistan if Afghans and the international community lend their united support.

Thirdly and lastly, with regard to the importance of Afghanistan's young generation, we watched with great satisfaction as Mr. Bakthiar — the first-ever Afghan youth representative to the United Nations — so aptly briefed the Council today. I thank him very much for that. The average age in Afghanistan, as we have already heard today, is just a little more than 18. More than 40 per cent of its population is under the age of 14. Against that background, it is a truism that children and young people play a tremendously important role in Afghan society. It is also true that we need to increase efforts in basic education, child protection and including younger people in the political process, especially younger women. We see encouraging signs in that regard, but more has to be done.

Germany actively contributes to academic infrastructure and formation in Afghanistan. In the field of information technology (IT), Germany supported the creation of several university IT centres, an IT department at the Ministry of Higher Education, and the IT Competence Centre of Afghanistan in Kabul, as well as the establishment of a computer science master's programme for Afghan lecturers, to offer a few examples.

In conclusion, Germany continues to support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and commends the Head of UNAMA for his great work, as well as the United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. Germany remains deeply committed to the Afghan people, in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners. We will certainly make this issue a focus of our upcoming term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): With one month to go, Australia is encouraged by preparations for Afghanistan's parliamentary elections. We urge the Government of Afghanistan to maintain its focus on delivering an inclusive and credible electoral process that will accurately reflect the will of the Afghan people. We also acknowledge the bravery and commitment of the Afghan people, who by registering have asserted their right to participate in free and democratic elections despite intimidation, threats and, tragically, violence. Consistent with our support for Afghanistan's security and development, Australia will contribute $5 million to the United Nations Electoral Support Project to assist with the holding of the 2018 parliamentary elections and the 2019 presidential elections.

As reflected in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/824), 2018 has been an especially bloody year. The continuing cost of the conflict, borne by civilians and the Afghan security forces alike, continues to deepen the wounds of a country tired of war. We deeply regret the continuing violence outlined in the report, and condemn the brutal and illegitimate attacks by insurgent groups, Daesh-inspired groups, Al-Qaida, its affiliates and other terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan. Together with our allies and partners in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Australia is committed to supporting Afghanistan to meet the challenges posed by those groups.

Australia welcomes Afghan Government leadership in seeking dialogue with the Taliban as an important step towards ending the conflict. President Ghani's offer in February of negotiations without preconditions, his unilateral June ceasefire and his August invitation to the Taliban to join an extended ceasefire are bold and unprecedented steps. We reaffirm Australia's support for the Kabul process, and encourage Afghanistan to

use it to draw together peace initiatives into a coherent, coordinated, non-partisan pathway to a sustainable Afghan-owned and -led political settlement. We call on the Taliban to honourably reciprocate the Government's ceasefire offer so as to reduce violence and create space for a broad-based and inclusive political process.

We stand with Afghanistan as it works to build on the political and popular momentum for peace. The hundreds of courageous Afghans marching from Helmand to Kabul during Ramadan is a powerful symbol of hope that should drive current and future Afghan Governments to set aside political differences to deliver on the people's priority of a more secure future. We further call on Afghanistan's neighbours to do all they can to encourage the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. Pakistan especially could have an important role in bringing about a negotiated peace in Afghanistan by taking sustained and decisive measures against insurgent groups that threaten regional peace and stability.

We note, in addition to many other challenges, that Afghanistan is facing an imminent food shortage that would affect two thirds of the country. An estimated 1.3 million people are likely to need emergency food and nutrition assistance. Australia will continue to help respond, including through our recent multi-year funding commitment to support the World Food Programme in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, Australia continues to value the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan under the able leadership of Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, in coordinating the United Nations and broader international efforts in Afghanistan. We appreciate the United Nations hosting the forthcoming Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan and look forward to the conference — halfway through the transformation decade — as an opportunity to take stock of Afghanistan's progress and to reaffirm our shared commitments to peace and development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): We extend our gratitude for the organization of this meeting. We also extend our gratitude to Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan for his statement. I should also like to thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing.

At a time when Afghanistan is experiencing such severe hardships, what it needs most is further robust and sustained international support. That is of the utmost importance in order to respond to the country's existing challenges, achieve lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region and promote its sustainable socioeconomic development. As a neighbouring country, Iran continues to contribute to and support the promotion of Afghanistan's stability, political-security conditions and socioeconomic development. Certain efforts are under way to ensure that such a contribution is carried out in an institutionalized and sustained manner.

We also continue our endeavours to promote regional efforts in support of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. In that regard, the development plan for Iran's Chabahar port will indeed have a significant impact on the promotion of trade and economic cooperation with Afghanistan. Any attempt to disrupt that vital project will play only into the hands of those who do not want peace and progress for the Afghan people.

Security remains Afghanistan's major challenge. It is one of the main requirements for long-term stability and socioeconomic development in Afghanistan. Therefore, enhancing its security situation should be pursued as a high priority. In that context, counter-terrorism efforts must have the highest priority. The recent terrorist acts, which claimed the lives of innocent civilians, further prove that the threat of terrorist groups, including Daesh, should not be underestimated. Iran will continue to support Afghanistan's Government in its struggle against terrorist groups. The need for sustained regional and international support in countering terrorists in Afghanistan is crucial. However, it needs to be achieved in a realistic manner.

Another source of concern in the security field in Afghanistan is the increase in civilian casualties. That includes the targeting of Shia communities and religious sites, resulting in high civilian casualties. That trend needs to be thwarted.

To enhance democracy, political institutions and national unity in Afghanistan, every effort should be made to ensure that the upcoming elections are held and result in success for the country. Iran will continue its constructive role in that regard.

We continue to support and commend the dedicated work of UNAMA and United Nations agencies in providing development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. Sustained ownership and partnership with the Afghan Government are needed in order to utilize the best potential of UNAMA and the United Nations system to deliver the necessary services in priority areas, as advised by Afghanistan's Government.

Despite the progress achieved, there remain challenges and threats in Afghanistan that need further sustained international support. In that context, we welcome the convening of the Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan that is to take place in November. The international community should remain resolute in securing a stable and prosperous Afghanistan. In turn, Iran will continue its full support to the fraternal people and Government of Afghanistan in their endeavour to achieve lasting peace and prosperity in their country. That is what they deserve.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.